



MDC Resource Science

Trees Work: A Baseline Survey of 3 Communities

Science Notes



Trees Work: A Baseline Survey of 3 Communities



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Information Need

Forestry Division has begun a state-wide campaign focused on increasing awareness of the benefits that trees and forests provide to Missourians. To be effective, this “Trees Work” campaign’s messages must resonate with a wide variety of groups and population segments, and do so in the brief opportunities. To develop and evaluate such targeted messages, we must understand 1) the current level of awareness of tree and forest benefits, 2) which of benefits are most important to Missourians, and 3) what messages are most likely to motivate people to action and what barriers prevent action toward sustainability of Missouri’s forests. The campaign is planned to last several years, so baseline research provides critical information for development and evaluation.

Methods

Three communities, Columbia, Salem, and Webster Groves, were chosen, not as representatives of all Missouri but as places where the campaign was about to be piloted, for a mail survey in 2013. Questions included respondents’ awareness of various environmental campaigns and tree benefits, which campaign linkages were most important, and which messages they found most resonant. MDC mailed out 6,700 surveys and received 2,426 responses, an overall response rate of 36%.

Results

- “Trees Work”, when compared to long established campaigns such as “Only you can prevent forest fires”, “Give a hoot, don’t pollute” and even “No MO Trash”, has low public awareness (20%). But this new campaign (which had only just appeared in the *Conservationist*) is already on a par with “Serving Nature and You” (22%, Table 1).
- The six message areas that MDC selected for the campaign (Trees Work For: Your Wallet, Your Health, Your Family, Your Community, Our Environment, and Our Economy) appear to have been well chosen. Over 80% of respondents said they would be “Very Interested” or “Somewhat Interested” in learning more about each area.
- Several messages tested in the survey stood out, with over 45% of respondents saying they would share the message, “Shade from two large trees can save up to 30% of a typical residence’s annual air conditioning costs,” with a friend or family member, and over 35% saying the same for “ADD symptoms in children are relieved after spending time in a treed area” and “A 10% increase in trees in a neighborhood reduces crime by 12%.”
- Fewer respondents (75% - still a large majority) agreed that “Forests benefit me” than that “Trees benefit me” (82%, Table 2).
- There were differences in responses based on age; younger respondents were less aware of several environmental messages, particularly “Give a Hoot, Don’t Pollute” (Table 3).

Using the information

MDC’s foresters and policy makers will be able to use these findings both to choose which messages to focus upon during the initial phases of the campaign, and to help evaluate the campaign’s impact after its initial phase. For example, based on the survey, foresters

should be using the word “trees” not “forests” when making contacts. This supports the Trees Work campaign’s decision to target younger audiences with the goal of sustaining the messaging over a long period of time. Also, although there were few differences between the communities in this baseline data, we can expect changes as the campaign is applied differentially. MDC plans to repeat the survey in the same communities after two years in order to detect any changes in awareness or attitudes.

Table 1. Percent of respondents (N=2,426) who had seen or heard an environmental message, MDC Trees Work baseline survey, 2013

Have you ever heard or seen these messages?	Yes	No	Do not know
Only you can prevent forest fires	96.8	1.6	0.8
Give a hoot, don’t pollute	86.0	9.9	2.2
Trees work	20.6	60.8	14.1
Serving Nature and You	22.7	57.9	15.4

Table 2. Percent of respondents (N=2,342) who agreed or disagreed with a benefit statement, MDC Trees Work baseline survey, 2013

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree	Trees benefit me	Missouri’s forests benefit me
Strongly Agree	82.2	75.5
Mildly Agree	11.7	15.6
Unsure	2.9	4.6
Mildly Disagree	0.3	0.3
Strongly Disagree	0.5	0.6

Table 3. Percent of respondents (N=2,426) who had seen or heard an environmental message by age group, MDC Trees Work baseline survey, 2013

Age (group)/ Awareness	Forest Fires	Don’t Pollute	Trees Work	Nature & You
20 to 35	97.4	72.5	11.0	14.9
36 to 50	96.6	96.8	18.8	23.3
51 to 65	98.9	94.2	20.9	22.8
Over 65	95.6	74.5	26.1	25.7

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